



**MINISTER OF HIGHER EDUCATION, SCIENCE AND INNOVATION
STATEMENT ON THE IMPLEMENTATION OF MEASURES BY THE
POST SCHOOL EDUCATION SECTOR IN RESPONSE TO COVID-19
EPIDEMIC**

23 May 2020

Programme Director;
Deputy Minister Buti Manamela;
Director General's Gwebinkundla Qonde
DDGs;
Members of the media;
Ladies and gentlemen

Good Day

COVID-19 has disrupted the 2020 academic year, but as we committed in our April 30 media briefing, we have been working hard during this month of May towards saving the academic year whilst saving lives.

The pandemic has presented us all with a set of unprecedented challenges, and we have been intensely engaging with all our

stakeholders to save the 2020 academic year whilst simultaneously continuing to focus on the transformation and expansion of opportunities in the post school education and training system (PSET).

I would like to express my gratitude to the exemplary leadership provided by President Ramaphosa and my colleagues at the National Command Council (NCC) in guiding our work at this difficult time.

I also remain humbled by the commitment of all members of the Ministerial Task Team, led by Deputy Minister Buti Manamela comprising of SACPO, USAf, Labour Unions, SAUS and SAFETSA. The task team has been playing an important role in finding creative and equitable solutions in the interests of all our students and staff in the PSET sector.

I also would like to acknowledge the role played by the leadership of the various trade unions organizing in our sector, especially our Labour Unions, represented by NEHAWU, SADTU, NTEU, PSA, SAPTU and NAPTOSA, as we collectively seek solutions to deal with this pandemic. In our recent engagements with the unions, they raised a number of important issues and suggestions, including how they think health and safety measures needs to be strengthened in all of our institutions. Arising out of this we have decided to help convene a consultative meeting specifically between management and union representatives in the sector.

We are also calling on all our PSET institutions to ensure full consultation with student and staff stakeholder bodies into University and College COVID-19 task teams to provide all necessary safeguards on managing risks and ensuring safe resumption of activities. We furthermore call on

all Councils to ensure that this is put into place, including the establishment of workplace occupational/health and safety committees

I would like to reiterate that our sector's response to COVID-19 is guided by measures announced by the National Command Council (NCC) and approved by Cabinet.

Our sector has adopted the theme: **Save The Academic Year Save Lives.**

ON NSFAS

During the period of the lockdown, NSFAS remained fully operational and continued to disburse allowances to all NSFAS beneficiaries.

I am also pleased to indicate that NSFAS has concluded an agreement with SARS to provide NSFAS access to latest tax data in order to validate household income of NSFAS applicants. NSFAS will now also be able to include other income such as investment and rental income in its applications assessment. This will greatly assist towards finalization of outstanding appeals.

Our initial analysis shows that more than **125 000** new students in 2020 come from households in the informal sector.

Our partnership with the Department of Social Development (DSD) saw a dramatic improvement in approvals for social welfare beneficiaries and more than **240 000** new entrants were approved for funding. Taken

together indeed NSFAS is truly providing for the most vulnerable and the poor members of our society by opening up gateways out of poverty.

The shift to provide for learning material for NSFAS students to include digital devices will not only address technology enabled pedagogy over the lockdown period but will truly move South African education into the modern era offering access to wider resources and teaching materials. This bold step will also be extended to TVET students for whom access to technology will improve their skills fit for a modern economy.

Recently the NSFAS Administrator assisted **70** medical students at the Walter Sisulu University (WSU) to obtain funding from HWSeta that entered medical studies following a NSFAS funded science degree.

During this lockdown period, we have also been providing stipends to all our SETA learnerships. We have also cleared the misunderstanding that existed at the beginning of the lockdown where some SETAs stopped the payments, and this has been corrected.

UNIVERSITIES

Remote multi-modal teaching and learning plans

All public universities have developed **detailed strategies for remote multi-modal teaching and learning** during the period of the current lockdown, for implementation as from beginning of June as per our previous commitments.

As I have indicated before, institutions have developed their detailed institutional plans, as each institution is unique and we cannot follow a 'one size fits all' approach.

Each institution has committed to ensuring that all students are given a fair opportunity to complete the academic year 2020. We are working closely with all universities to ensure the implementation of this commitment.

University Teaching, Learning, Assessment and Campus Readiness Plans have been submitted to the Department along with a detailed costing of the additional funding required to implement them.

The Department is currently reviewing the plans, in order to urgently finalise the reprioritisation of earmarked funding to support the implementation of the teaching and learning plans by 1 June.

Higher Health is assisting with the review of the campus readiness component of the plans, which will assist to ensure that adequate COVID-19 health and safety standards are put into place across the PSET system, and they will do a short presentation at this media briefing.

The funding that will be reprioritised will be approved as a special Covid-19 Responsiveness Grant (CRG).

Devices for NSFAS and Funza Lushaka university students

We acknowledge that the cost of connectivity remains a huge barrier for students who want to use the digital learning mode as part of our multi-modal and remote learning.

I want to thank the officials in my Department of Higher Education and Training, my colleagues and officials in the Department of Communications and Digital Technologies and the Electronic Network Providers, including the Mobile Network Operators, that have already zero-rated educational content sites of our public universities, TVET and CET Colleges, including Agricultural and Nursing Colleges.

This is a huge step forward and highlighted the effective collaboration between the Department and the telecommunications sector. Zero rating means that access to institutional websites will be free, although some of the embedded content like YouTube and videos will be charged for.

The next step is to make “Educational Data Bundles” available to all NSFAS students in universities and TVET Colleges, that they can use to pay for additional contents that is not covered through the zero-rating.

I am pleased to announce that we have successfully negotiated with all mobile network operators very favourable rates for our NSFAS students, including the Funza Lushaka students who will receive **10GB** daytime and **20GB** night-time data for three (3) months, starting from 1 June till end of August, as subsidised by government.

In weeks to come, we will give detailed information on how to access these offers.

While we acknowledge that students who fall within the so-called “missing middle” category, as well as students in private institutions, also need support in accessing data for their online learning, as many of them also come from homes that are hardest hit by the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, unfortunately government is currently not in a position to subsidize them. We however appeal to MNOs to work with institutions to also offer affordable packages to such students. I am however working towards establishment of an affordable higher education loan scheme involving the private sector.

I want to repeat what I said in my previous statement that NSFAS and the Funza Lushaka students must ensure that they register their cell-phone numbers with their respective institutions. We advise that during this period, they must also not change their sim-cards so as to enable network operators, through their institutions, to load data to their devices.

I just want to emphasise that this data that needy students will receive must be used for dedicated online educational platforms for teaching and learning as approved by institutions.

I therefore would like to acknowledge and thank all the network operators (MTN, Telkom, Vodacom and Cell C) who have been working with us to ensure that we deliver on this important intervention.

We have also made free digital content available specifically to our TVET College students through our DHET website, the National Open Learning

System (NOLS) of our Department, institutional websites and other sites, where students can find digital materials which will assist them in their learning and preparation for exams.

I therefore call upon all our TVET students to visit these sites and see for themselves the myriad of content available to assist them.

Universities will also be delivering paper-based teaching and learning materials to students who do not have the resources to engage electronically or online.

The physical delivery of learning materials is one aspect of our multimodal approach that many of our universities are implementing.

The implementation of this intervention depends on each university's assessment of the number of students that require this kind of support.

As we try to find better ways to implement effective multi modal, augmented remote learning systems, we are considering the use of Space Science and Earth Observation technologies and platforms in support of our plans to reach to vulnerable students. The Department of Science and Innovation, in conjunction with the Department of Communications and Digital Technologies, SENTECH and South African National Space Agency, is currently looking at a long-term solution to supporting the digital transmission needs for the national education system through the launch of a locally-produced communications satellite.

The CSIR is also completing the task of establishing a Geospatial planning map identifying the location and distribution of learning and co-

learning sites in all the districts of South Africa to enable us to support students in the period before full return to campuses.

As stated in our last briefing, government is committed to ensure that all NSFAS students have access to an appropriate device to support their online learning and to ensure that no student is left behind. Some universities have already issued their students with laptops, some as part of their normal policies, others as a response to COVID-19.

A lot of work then had to be undertaken to quantify the exact number and location of these students who still need to be issued with devices. That work has now been completed and procurement will commence as soon as the approval of the Minister of Finance is received.

Risk Adjusted Strategy for PSET Sector

The PSET Sector is committed to resume academic activities in line with the national risk-adjusted strategy. This includes putting remote learning systems in place as well as planning the gradual return to various campuses during various phases of the risk-adjusted strategy. The Ministry will publish national Directives on the broad parameters and conditions under which each institution must plan for the controlled resumption of all forms and levels of academic activity to complete the 2020 Academic Year.

Level 4 (Started 1 May 2020)

Under level 4, we allowed for the controlled return of final year students in programmes requiring clinical training, starting with medicine (MBChB)

and the phasing-in of all other programmes, such as Nursing, Dental, Veterinary Sciences, and so on. Medical students have been returning to clinical training platforms from 11 May, and other final students in other programmes requiring clinical training will begin returning from 1 June 2020.

All other students are supported through remote multimodal teaching, learning and assessment until they can return to campus.

Level 3

Under level 3, a maximum of 33% of the student population will be allowed to return to campuses, delivery sites and residences on condition that they can be safely accommodated and supported in line with the health and safety protocols as directed by the Department.

This will include the following cohorts:

- All groups that have already returned during alert level 4.
- Students in the final year of their programmes, who are on a path to graduating in 2020 may return.
- Final year students who require access to laboratories, technical equipment, data, connectivity and access to residence and private accommodation should return.
- Students in all years of study that require clinical training in their programmes (provided that the clinical training platforms have sufficient space and can accommodate them while adhering to the safety protocols).

- Post Graduate students who require laboratory equipment and other technical equipment to undertake their studies.

In addition to the above, institutions may also consider selected return of other categories of students to residences who may face extreme difficulties in their home learning environments provided that the above categories are prioritized, and all safety and logistical requirements are met.

When a district moves to Level 3 of the strategy, then the reintegration of the next group of students to return to campuses located in that district will take place. So for example, if in a particular district Level 3 is announced to begin on 1 June 2020, then institutions where campuses are located in that district will recall students, in line with the following criteria, to start their contact tuition two to three weeks after the announcement, depending on readiness and capacity of each institution.

Should Level 3 be announced to begin on 15 June, then students would be recalled to start two to three weeks thereafter. In other words a period of two to three weeks will be given to allow students to travel back to their campuses and institutions to ensure that the campuses are effectively prepared for the return.

I will publish Directions in terms of the Disaster Management Act to permit such travel. Institutions will issue permits to identified students to allow for their travel.

It is critical that we adhere to these criteria to ensure that campuses are ready for students to safely return, and the effective health screening, cleaning protocols are in place to keep everyone safe.

All other students will be supported through remote multimodal teaching learning and assessment until they can return to campus.

It is recognised that some institutions may identify other groups of students in line with their particular contexts. However, any deviation from this criteria must be approved by my Department and must fall within the maximum of 33% of the student population.

Level 2

When a district moves to Level 2 of the strategy, then the reintegration of the next group of students to return to contact tuition on campuses located in that district will take place according to the following criteria. Once again, a two week period will be given to allow students to travel back to their campuses and for institutions to ensure that the campuses are effectively prepared for the reintegration.

Under level 2, a maximum of 66% of the student population will return to campus for teaching, learning and assessment in line with the following criteria:

- All groups that have already returned;
- Students in all years of study who require laboratory and technical equipment to complete the academic year;
- Students in all years of study who require practical placements/ experiential learning/ work place-based learning to complete the

academic year (provided the work places and platforms are open and prepared).

- First year students in all undergraduate programmes.

Again, institutions may also consider selected return of other categories of students to residences who may face extreme difficulties in their home learning environments provided that the above categories are prioritized, and all safety and logistical requirements are met.

All other students will be supported through remote multimodal teaching learning and assessment until they can return to campus.

Level 1

In the same way, when Level 1 is announced, a two-week period will be given in order for students to travel back to their campuses and for institutions to ensure that the campuses are effectively prepared for the reintegration.

Under level 1, it is expected that 100% of the student population should return to campus. We are therefore going to require the strictest enforcement of physical distancing and health protocols.

I will be publishing the criteria for the risk adjusted strategy for the return of students as outlined in the Government Gazette.

Institutional campus readiness plans have been submitted and the Department is also analysing the plans with the aim of approving the

necessary reprioritisation of funds to support these campus readiness plans through the COVID-19 Responsiveness Grant (CRG).

As reported in our previous statement, we were to facilitate training of almost 18 000 (actual figure is 17 750) frontline health workers, the leadership and membership of trade unions, and shop stewards on dealing with COVID-19.

I am pleased to report that we have already signed a Memorandum of Agreement (contract) between HW – SETA and Wits Health Consortium and training will resume soon.

Return to Residences

Within the national guidelines to be published by the Department, plans for the return of students to residences will be determined at institutional level, in line with numbers that can be accommodated to enable physical distancing, the handling of communal spaces, hygiene requirements and dining hall arrangements.

Students identified to reintegrate into campuses may include specific groups of students who are living with disabilities, who are not able to access connectivity where they live, or are living in circumstances where studying is difficult. In terms of the phase-in plans, the maximum % per residence identified for the level (Level 3 - 33%; Level 2 - 66%) must be adhered to and all health and safety protocols must be in place. Students who live in private rented accommodation close to campuses may also return provided physical distancing arrangements are in place.

TVET COLLEGES

For TVET Colleges, a tentative academic calendar has been drawn up pending any new announcements on the different levels of the lockdown by the President. In terms of the tentative calendar the following return dates apply:

NATED Trimester (ENGINEERING) students

N6 & N3: 10 June

N5 & N2: 15 June

N4 & N1: 22 June

NATED Semester (BUSINESS STUDIES) students

N6: 25 June

N5: 29 June

N4: 06 July

NC(V) STUDENTS

Level 4: 13 July

Level 3: 20 July

Level 2: 27 July

A campus- based approach will be applied where colleges are affected by different lockdown levels. Campuses located in districts that remain in lockdown level 4 will remain closed and students will be supported using multi-modal remote learning approaches. Each of these colleges will therefore develop a detailed remote learning support plan and share it with students as well as post it on the college website.

Several colleges have already developed learning materials both for TV and radio broadcasts which are shared through the DHET website. These initiatives will continue beyond the return of students to campuses. Furthermore, all students who will not have returned to campuses in June and July will also be supported remotely until they return to campus according to the phase-in process.

Colleges are using textbooks, e-Guides, past question papers, and uploaded YouTube videos to assist students. These are supported through bulk text messages from colleges and WhatsApp groups set up by lecturers.

COMMUNITY EDUCATION AND TRAINING

It is important to state upfront the CET college system is severely constrained in respect of infrastructure and uses mainly schools infrastructure after hours. It is for that reason that the Department has taken a conscious decision that, while we are building the infrastructural capacity of this system, for now its academic programmes must be aligned to that of the Department of Basic Education.

Therefore, as part of the CET college system preparation for the return of students and staff to Colleges and community learning centres, the Department continues to engage with a variety of stakeholders including labour and churches to strengthen the capacity of the system.

Guided by the principle to save lives and the academic year, the CET colleges will spend the rest of May 2020 preparing the central offices and the learning centres to be ready for safe return of staff and students.

Subject to readiness of the colleges and centre, the following are the dates for the return of different categories of staff to their workstations:

- 25 May 2020: Principals, Deputy Principals and Supply Chain Management staff,
- 1 June 2020: Centre managers,
- 8 June 2020: all Lecturers,
- 17 June for students registered for *General Education Training Certificate*, *Senior Certificate* as well National Occupational Certificates qualifications or part-qualifications.
- The return of AET Levels 1 to 3 students will be synchronised with the return of learners in the lower Grades in the public schools.

In the unfortunate event that some learning sites are located in districts and metros that remain on Lockdown Level 4 such learning sites shall be closed or remain closed.

The affected student registered for General Education and Training Certificate, Senior Certificate, National Occupational Certificates shall only get an opportunity to sit for examination in May/June 2021 to enable them to complete the 2020 academic year.

SECTOR EDUCATION AND TRAINING AUTHORITIES

SETAs are currently engaging the employers and skills development institutions (public and private) regarding the return of learners.

We are all aware that under Risk Adjusted Strategy Alert Level 4, there is limited number of employees who can return to the workplaces, however I would like to make a call to all employers, both in the public and private sectors even during Alert Level 4, to turn their workplaces into training spaces. This also goes beyond this level.

SETAs have also committed to priorities skills development related to COVID-19 pandemic areas in support of the supply and demand of essential goods and services during COVID-19 period and beyond, with particular focus on the provision of opportunities for Small Enterprises and Cooperatives.

COMMENCEMENT OF INFRASTRUCTURE PROJECTS

One other important matter to highlight is the commencement of our Infrastructure projects in our campuses. All our institutions are preparing for the resumption of construction activities upon gazetting of Regulations permitting construction activities in the Post School Education and Training sector. Such activities will have to be done within the national health and safety protocols as governed by the disaster regulations.

COLLABORATION WITH QUALITY ASSURANCE BODIES

I must also highlight that as a Department we are working closely and seamlessly with all education quality assurance bodies in South Africa to ensure that COVID-19 measures do not temper or affect the quality of qualifications offered by all our PSET institutions.

The measures have only affected the methodology of offering programmes by institutions not the quality of our qualifications.

SOUTH AFRICA-MADAGASCAR COLLABORATION

As the Department of Science and Innovation we have a bilateral agreement with the Madagascar Science and Technology Department. Specific areas of collaboration include indigenous knowledge systems, particularly traditional medicines research. The Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR) has signed a programme of action with the Malagasy Institute of Applied Research.

Following Madagascar's Presidential launch of an *Artemisia annua* product, Covid-Organics, the country was advised to seek independent evaluation of the product.

As a department we are willing to partner Madagascar within the context of WHO Guidelines for Evaluation of Traditional Medicines.

In honoring our continental responsibility, and as a chair of the African Union, we will avail the necessary facilities and manpower in partnering with any of our fellow African member states to find solutions for COVID-19.

This will include necessary advice on non-disclosure agreements and all related intellectual property rights requirements which must be cleared upfront, sharing of relevant data, conducting all necessary tests on safety, efficacy and quality.

For the South African team to provide this essential service on African continent; it is critical for both the Department of Science and Innovation and Department of Health leadership to request for the official Reference Centers for African Medicines status from the WHO-AFRO. This will facilitate WHO, African Union or NEPAD financial, infrastructure and expert support.

In the spirit of Agenda 2063, Africa must leverage its indigenous knowledge, biodiversity and innovation know-how for building its manufacturing capacity.

I would like to take this opportunity to once-more all our stakeholders who we have been consulting throughout this process. Special gratitude also goes to the President, my colleagues in Cabinet and the National Command Council.

Thank you very much

-END-

Word count: 3571